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ABSTRACT

Dominica is the largest and least densely populated of the islands of the Organization of Easter Caribbean States. This paper provides a socioeconomic overview of Dominica and highlights the nation's efforts to comply with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The paper provides data on population, sex ratio, migration patterns, population density, ethnic groups, agriculture, informal employment, and poverty. The paper goes on to highlight activities being undertaken to support the CRC, which Dominica ratified in March, 1991, including the World Bank-sponsored Basic Education Reform Project. This project will construct new secondary schools and rehabilitate many primary schools. The paper also notes that the new Dominica Education Act being considered by parliament addresses the rights of children. (MDM)

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# DOMINICA

Francois Barrie

## INTRODUCTION

Dominica is the largest and the least densely populated of the islands of the OECS. It sits between two French islands namely: Guadeloupe to the North and Martinique to the South, and with them shares a common French-based folk language or "KWEYOL". The island is characterized by high mountains and very rugged and steep terrain which constitute both boon and bane - a natural beauty of lush green valleys beneath green-capped mist shrouded peaks from which sprout feathery waterfalls. Dominica possesses a topography which makes it almost insurmountably difficult to develop and maintain the necessary physical infrastructure (roads, airport, harbours) for development.

## POPULATION SIZE

Dominica's population dropped between the censuses of 1891 and 1901 and again between the 1981 and 1991. Total population increased gradually from 27,178 in 1871 to 47,624 in 1946, i.e an average increase of 273 per year. The average annual increase in population more than tripled to 914 between 1946 and 1970 and then tapered off to 386 per year between 1970 and 1981. There was an actual decline in population between 1981 and 1991, the average rate of decline being 261 per year.

## SEX RATIO

The sex ratio, i.e. the number of men per 100 women in the population declined from 88 in 1871 to 80 in 1901. From then on the number of men to women in the population has gradually increased, and in 1991 the number of men roughly equalled that of women in the population.

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## *MIGRATION*

Dominica has historically been an island characterized by out-migration. This has significantly moderated the rate of overall population increase which is also reflected in the sex ratio trends of the islands. During the last quarter of the last century and very early in this century, there were waves of relatively heavy out-migration first to the gold mine of Venezuela, then to Central America to work on the construction of the Panama Canal and finally to the sugar plantation of Cuba. The bulk of migration were mainly done by males, hence the decline in sex ration from 1871 until early years of this century.

The 1940s and 50s saw new wave of migration first, to oil refineries of Aruba and Curacao and then to the United Kingdom. These out-migration waves included large numbers of women as well as men resulting in only a small change in the sex ratio from 88 to 90 during the period 1946 to 1970. The rapid increase in sex ratio observed between 1970 and 1991 from 90 to 99 men per 100 women, has been due largely to the heavy out-migration to North America, the US Virgin Islands, Antigua and Guadeloupe mainly of women seeking employment in nursing in the hospitality services and at domestics. This heavy migration of women, many of them mothers, could have serious consequences on the number of children left behind in care of relatives and friends.

The full impact of migration on population may be deduce from the following:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| a. | 1981 population | 73,795 |
| b. | 1991 population | 71,183 |
| c. | Intercensal change | 2,612 |
| d. | Registered birth | 17,179 |
| e. | Registered death | 4,466 |
| f. | Natural Increase (d-e) | 12,713 |
| g. | Implied net migration | 15,325 |

***Source - Central Statistics Office, Dominica.***

These figures indicates then, an average of more than 15,000 Dominicans emigrated between 1981 and 1991 than those who came in to reside. This means that during the past ten or more years the number of persons who migrated from Dominica each year exceeds 2% of the population.

## Population Density

The island is relatively sparsely populated. With its areas of 289.5 sq. miles (750 sq. km) the population density increased from 240 per sq. mile (93 sq. km) in 1981 to 246 per square mile or 95 per sq. km in 1991.

The table hereunder shows the population density by parishes. The most densely populated parishes into which the island is divided are the parish of St. George which includes Roseau, the main City, Commercial Centres, Government building and the contiguous parishes of St. Paul, St, Mark and St. Luke which includes high population residential extension of the city.

The least densely populated are the rural parishes of St. Joseph and St. Peter on the West Coast and St. Andrews and St. David which includes the Carib Territory on the East Coast.

Population (1991) density by Parish and Total.

| Parish | Population Per Square Mile |
|---|---|
| St. George | 341 |
| St. Paul | 114 |
| St. Joseph | 48 |
| St. Peter | 50 |
| St. John | 83 |
| St. Andrew | 61 |
| St. David | 50 |
| St. Patrick | 101 |
| St. Mark | 195 |
| St. Luke | 194 |
| **TOTAL** | **1,237** |

*Source - Central Statistics Office*

## Population Composition

According to the CSO 1991 Population and Housing Census Report which is the source of all demographic data, blacks constitutes overwhelming ethnic majority in Dominica as evidenced by the following:

| Ethnic Group | Percent Of Population |
|---|---|
| Black | 89 |
| Carib | 2 |
| Mixed | 7 |
| Other | 2 |

The "CARIBS" are the last survivors of the original Amerindians population of the island. They constitute a very small percentage (2%) of the population, and are found exclusively in the Carib Territory located on the North-East of the island.

The Carib Territory or Salybia was constituted in the year 1903 by Heskeith Bell, being native Governor at the time. The governance of the Territory lies in the hands of the Carib Chief and Council who are elected every five years. In support, there is a Parliamentary Representative who assist in the Territory's development. The land is held in common with no one having a Certificate of Title. The total land area is 3,782 acres and has a population of almost 4,000 people. Numerous hamlets from Bataca to Sineku constitutes the hamlet.

There is electricity throughout the Territory. Marpin Cable T.V. can be found in some areas, but no pipe borne water supply is available.

The Caribs are simple people, and agriculture is the main monetary occupation. Among the crops grown are, bananas, coconuts and ground provision.

In the Territory, there are four Primary Schools where the children obtain their education;

| | |
|---|---|
| Sineku - 138 | Salybia - 247 |
| Atkinson - 168 | Concord - 47 |

The Caribs are very skilled in basket making (craft work) and boat-building. The Larouma Reed and the Gomier are used for craft work and boat-making. Language spoken are creole, patois and English. There is a strong urge that Carib History should be taught in the Carib Territory. Of course the Carib Language is long gone, extinct, and only a few words can be said.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| MABRIKA | - | Good Day |
| CARIFUNA | - | Carib |
| MAKEROU | - | Negroid |
| KALINAGO | - | Tribe |

Unemployment is high among the youth of the Community, and many of them come to Roseau for employment.

## AGRICULTURE

The Agricultural Sector has traditionally been the largest employer of labour in the island as well as the sector which contributed most of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Small family farms which provide employment for both male and female members of the household are a picture of the sector which in 1991 provided employment for nearly 1/4 of the total work force: 32% of the male work force and 8% of the female work force.

8,384 farmers in 1995 contributed to the economy of Dominica.

## INFORMAL SECTOR

There is a widespread and growing number of small entrepreneurs and self employed persons who operate outside the formal business sector. Foremost among these are the hucksters men and mainly women who purchase local agriculture and horticulture produce which they sell in the neighbouring French and Leeward Islands of St. Martin and the British Virgin Islands. The hucksters has provided a market outlet for handcrafts as well as for fruits, root crops and other traditional produce. Small farmers has also contributed to the island's Agricultural diversification efforts by initiating export outlets for such non-traditional items as passion fruits and local pink anthuriums. The Dominica Huckster Association represents 450 out of an estimated 500 persons in this business service in Dominica. Women of an average age of 35, make up 85% of their members. The volume of business is approximately EC$5 Million dollars per year. On average , every huckster travels every three weeks for a total of 6,000 round trip air line tickets from Dominica to adjacent islands.

## Poverty

The draft report of BDDC financial Poverty Assessment study in Dominica estimates that 28% of households in Dominica live in poverty, i.e, are unable to adequately meet their basic needs. Preliminary reports of the study indicated that a household of 4 persons (the average household size for Dominica according to the 1991 Census) requires a minimum of $214 per week for survival.

Sineku in the Carib Territory has been assessed as a poor area and will be given attention so as to alleviate such poverty.

## Convention On The Rights Of The Child (CRC)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a comprehensive statement on the rights of children everywhere to survival and development. In the context of this convention, a child is defined as every human being under the age of eighteen, unless the national law allows for the attainment of maturity age earlier.

The Government of Dominica has recognized the importance of and has given matters pertaining to children high priority. It remains committed to formulating policies and programmes as well as reforming and enacting new legislation for survival and development of children.

An intensive parenting education programme is necessary. A coalition of parents for that purpose is suggested. The World Food Bank-sponsored Basic Education Reform Project will soon see the construction of new secondary schools in Castle Bruce, Grand Bay, Portsmouth and the rehabilitation of many Primary Schools. Under the same project, the management capability of the education sector will be strengthened and improved.

Teacher Training (Education) will be tremendously boosted as many teachers are now at Universities worldwide getting the necessary training.

The new Dominica Education Act is to come to Parliament shortly so as to make it law. In this act, the rights of the child is to be looked into as well as assisting parents to recognize the rights of children.

Children have rights as follows:

* To be seen and heard
* Adequate living standard
* To receive a proper education
* Proper health care
* Free from abuse
* Protection
* To be developed physically, mentally, socially and spiritually.

Dominica ratified the Convention on the UN Rights of the Child on March 13, 1991.